BRITISH COLUMBIA

Work Able Solutions

Recruiting and Retaining Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia

AN EMPLOYER HANDBOOK

Advancing Professional People Practices®

HRMA

BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Best Place on Earth

WORKABLE SOLUTIONS

An Initiative of the Minister's Council
on Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Recruiting and Retaining Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia

AN EMPLOYER HANDBOOK

Advancing Professional People Practices®

HRMA

BRITISH COLUMBIA

www.gov.bc.ca

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data
Main entry under title:
Recruiting and retaining persons with disabilities in British Columbia : an employer handbook.

"Workable Solutions"
"An initiative of the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities"
ISBN 0772-65249-X

1. People with disabilities – Employment - British Columbia. 2. People with disabilities – Recruiting - British Columbia. 3. Employees – Recruiting - British Columbia. 4. Employee selection – British Columbia.
I. British Columbia. Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities. II. British Columbia. Ministry of Human Resources. III. Title: Recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities.

HD7256.C32B74 2004 331.5'9'09711 C2004-960155-5

Table of Contents

1.0	**Who is this Handbook for and how to use it**	5	
2.0	**Hiring Persons with Disabilities – the business case for employers**	6	
3.0	**How to Recruit and Retain Persons with Disabilities**	7	
4.1	COMPONENT ONE **Getting Started**	11	**Getting Started**
4.2	COMPONENT TWO **Job Design**	15	**Job Design**
4.3	COMPONENT THREE **Recruiting**	17	**Recruiting**
4.4	COMPONENT FOUR **Orientation & Preparation**	21	**Orientation**
4.5	COMPONENT FIVE **Employee Development**	25	**Employee Development**
4.6	COMPONENT SIX **Retention**	27	**Retention**
4.7	COMPONENT SEVEN **Return to Work**	29	**Return to Work**
5.0	**Resources**	33	

1
Getting Started
2
Job Design
3
Recruiting
4
Orientation & Preparation
5
Employee Development
6
Retention
7
Return to Work
Recruitment & Retention

Who is this Handbook for and how to use it

As an employer, you want to find the best possible candidates for the jobs you create. You want to hire people with all the skills that will keep your company growing and succeeding in an increasingly competitive economy. Additionally, you want to attract individuals who are loyal, reliable, conscientious and willing to learn.

Staff turnover costs your company valuable time and money. Research demonstrates that the total cost of replacing an employee, counting both direct and indirect costs, is within the range of 70 to 200 percent of their salary.

Employers need to look to new and non-traditional sources for skilled employees. One source that has largely been overlooked is persons with disabilities – they want to work for you, and have the skills you are looking for.

Research demonstrates that the total cost of replacing an employee, counting direct and indirect costs, is within the range of 70 to 200 percent of their salary.

This handbook shows you how to turn challenges into workable solutions and increase the recruitment and retention of persons with disabilities through information, awareness, education and training, accommodations, workplace supports and effective disability management.

It provides you with a practical "how-to" approach to recruiting and retaining persons with disabilities. The handbook provides useful information on how to undertake seven components of the "recruitment/retention cycle. You can review and use information in each component of the cycle—in whatever sequence works for you—or you can go to just one part of it and take what you need.

This handbook should be one tool in your recruitment toolbox. To maximize its benefit, you may wish to partner with a community-based employment agency.

An employer interviewee suggested that when persons with disabilities groups approach businesses, they need to present a strong cost-benefit rationale, a good business case – his experience is this often receives superficial attention.

BC industry leader

Hiring Persons with Disabilities

The Business Case for Employers

Demand and Supply of Skilled Workers – The Current Picture

British Columbia employers can expect to create over one million new job openings between 2003 and 2015. Declining birth rates, combined with no expected appreciable increases in international or inter-provincial migration, will make it more difficult for employers to find workers. Employers know they must recruit and make better use of existing sources of skilled labour.

> **In order to meet the expected labour force demand [created by the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games], any economic initiatives will require targeting non-traditional workers, such as individuals with disabilities, to compensate for the expected labour supply and demand imbalance in BC.**
>
> *A Profile of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia: Employment, Labour Market Needs and Occupational Projections, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., December 2003.*

More and more employers and business groups are having difficulty finding and keeping skilled workers.

The reduced level of new labour force entrants and higher levels of retirements means a smaller workforce if existing underutilized talent pools like persons with disabilities are not more effectively deployed.

> **Jock Finlayson of the Business Council of BC recently summed BC's labour shortage up:** Add it all up and the message is clear. While they do not yet amount to a major economy-wide problem, shortages of qualified workers will become a significant issue for many BC businesses by the end of the decade.
>
> *Business in Vancouver, Issue 774, August 24, 2004.*

Persons with Disabilities – An Under-utilized Talent Pool

One in seven British Columbians reported having a disability in 2001[1]. Of this 530,130 persons with a disability in BC in 2001, 290,880 were of working age (15-64).

Persons with disabilities in BC were three and a half times more likely to be unemployed than those without disabilities — 21 percent versus 6 percent respectively. Further, 44 percent of persons with disabilities in BC were employed, compared to 72 percent of the workforce without disabilities.

> **FACT – The majority of employers have no employees with disabilities – only 31 percent of the businesses surveyed had any employees with disabilities, while over two-thirds of employers had no such employees.**
>
> *Recruitment and Retention of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia Research Report*

The Business Case – A Case of Win-Win-Win

All research points to the fact that persons with disabilities represent a large, growing and as yet untapped pool of talent. In his 2001 report, *Business Case for Accessibility*, Bill Wilkerson, CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, summarized the human resource potential in this way:

> For far too many years, people with disabilities have been ignored in the marketplace. Yet this significant segment of the population is made up of many dedicated and talented people with much-needed abilities that have so far been under-utilized in the work environment.

The business case for hiring persons with disabilities is a very simple equation:

- Employers need skilled workers
- Persons with disabilities are a largely untapped human resource available to meet today's growing labour and skill shortages
- Persons with disabilities are a large, growing consumer market.

> **"Customers have been very vocal and very supportive."**
> *BC bank manager*

By bringing these factors together, we can achieve a "win-win-win" and successfully address one of BC's largest economic and social challenges.

Expanded Talent Pool	Employers in British Columbia need skilled employees to fill positions that keep their businesses competitive in local, provincial, national and global markets. With the number of labour force entrants expected to decline, employers cannot continue to ignore any untapped pool of talent.
Employment for Persons With Disabilities	Persons with disabilities continue to struggle to share in the social and economic mainstream of society. Individuals, employers and governments are all impacted by the costs that result from unacceptable unemployment rates and wasted human potential amongst persons with disabilities.
Growing Consumer Market	In Canada, the spending power of persons with disabilities is now estimated to be about $25 billion. They also influence the spending decisions of friends and families and, in doing so, at least double their economic reach. Companies that recognize the value of reflecting the characteristics of their consumers within their workplaces will reap the benefits in productivity and sales.

DuPont, a leader in employing persons with disabilities, has surveyed and documented its experiences over the past 30 years. Its findings have been consistent: "Employees with disabilities are equivalent to DuPont's other employees in job performance, attendance and safety."

> **An analysis published by the Royal Bank of Canada in April 2000 concluded that, "As Baby Boomers age, they will spark a 1.4 million increase in the number of working age Canadians with some form of disability by 2010."**

How to Recruit and Retain Persons with Disabilities

Understanding the business case for hiring persons with disabilities is an important step toward developing an inclusive workplace, but it may not be enough. Employers often report that they don't know how to get started, who can help them, or what issues they will face along the way.

Dispelling Fears, Myths and Attitudes

> **"Perceptions, fears and a lack of awareness and knowledge of disability issues among employers, supervisors and staff were the key barriers identified. Fear of persons with disabilities was identified as a huge reason why employers choose not to hire persons with disabilities. Specifically, fear around disabilities with stigmas such as HIV related disabilities was mentioned, along with fear of re-injury in terms of the cost involved. This makes it hard for employers to consider someone who has been injured in the past."**
> *Recruitment and Retention of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia Research Report*

Persons with disabilities consistently report that employer "attitude" is the most consistent barrier that they must overcome to be successfully employed. Focus group sessions held as part of the research leading to this handbook agreed. Fear of persons with disabilities was identified as a key reason why employers choose not to hire persons with disabilities. Additionally, employer's lack of knowledge on disability issues emerged as a key theme in the focus groups. Employers are not sure what to expect if they hire a person with a disability, so they do not. As one participant put it, "…small [business] employers may not know what they do not know."

In the absence of factual information, it is common to fear someone who is different. Information and experience help to dispel our fears.

Myth	Reality
Persons with disabilities can't keep up with other workers.	90 percent of persons with disabilities rated average or better on job performance than their non-disabled colleagues.*
A person with a disability is likely to miss a lot of work.	86 percent of people with disabilities rated average or better on attendance than their non-disabled colleagues.*
My staff wouldn't want to work with a person with a disability.	Persons with disabilities bring diversity to the workplace, which has a distinct and positive effect on staff morale.
A person with a disability cannot work in a position requiring physical labour.	Only 10.5 percent of persons with disabilities have mobility related disabilities.**
Hiring a person with a disability will require changing my workplace.	The vast majority of persons with disabilities who are currently employed require no special workplace accommodations.
A person with a disability will have more accidents on the job.	98 percent of people with a disability rate average or better in work safety than their non-disabled colleagues.*
Accommodations make it too expensive to hire a person with a disability.	Accommodations for persons with disabilities are generally very inexpensive and are tax deductible.
Persons with disabilities don't really want to work.	Staff retention is 72 percent higher among persons with disabilities, saving millions of dollars each year in recruitment and training costs.*

*https://www.work.asn.au/disability/people/index.cfm
** PALS survey, Stats Can, 2001

The rest of this handbook provides practical information for employers to successfully complete any or all components of the recruitment/retention cycle for employing persons with disabilities.

Recruitment and Retention Cycle

COMPONENT ONE: **Getting Started**

A starting point for recruiting persons with disabilities is to acknowledge your own fears and beliefs about this population. People are all different. For persons with disabilities, often the differences are more visible. Sometimes seeing difference, in the absence of knowledge or experience, creates fear and uncertainty.

Raising your Organization's Disability IQ

> **Stereotypes, generalizations and labels are seductively easy to use. But they obscure the singular blend of talents, skills and personality traits of each individual. For that reason, people in the business sector must demonstrate the vision to challenge their own assumptions about people with physical, sensory, mental or intellectual disabilities.** *Business Case for Accessibility,* Bill Wilkerson

To create an inclusive work environment where persons with disabilities are welcomed, supported and appreciated for their abilities; you first have to address issues that don't support an inclusive workplace, including employee attitudes and beliefs. Creating awareness and sensitivity are the foundations for an inclusive work environment. Persons with disabilities often don't need any kind of physical accommodation, and when accommodations are required they are often specific to the employee with a disability.

> **Effective Practices** – Focus Group Participants identified these practical solutions to recruiting and retaining persons with disabilities:
> - Liaise with community outreach programs
> - Increase awareness, promotions and advertising
> - Learn about appropriate selection criteria
> - Develop appropriate interviewing practices
> - Assign a responsible senior manager/champion
> - Establish targets
> - Develop a flexible workplace
> - Involve staff with disabilities in decision making
> - Design and implement specific disability management plans
> - Educate and train all staff
> - Identify associated costs and place in context
>
> *Recruitment and Retention of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia Research Report*

There are several critical success factors to consider as you move toward being an inclusive employer:

Leadership

Change requires leadership. Your company's managers and supervisors need to let employees know that your business will be actively recruiting persons with disabilities. You need to acknowledge the existence of fears and negative attitudes and take steps to address them. As a first step, you need to:

- find out what your staff know and feel about the issue, what their experience has been, and what their expectations or concerns might be about working with a person with a disability
- identify key staff who share and support your new direction and who will help to ensure the successful integration of persons with disabilities into your company.

Human Resources Staff and Managers

The people in your organization who are responsible for hiring are the ones who will put a leadership commitment into action. It is important that they understand the commitment your company is making and develop their own commitment to creating an inclusive workplace and recruitment process for persons with disabilities.

Who do we need to influence?

"It's at the management/supervisory level – not the CEO or senior management. It's the people who have to implement good intentions and work directly with persons with disabilities that we have to influence; we need to equip them with skills to do things like job analysis and to determine what skills are needed."

BC Employer

Offer Information

The best way to dispel fear is to provide information and knowledge. Starting with basic information about the major disability types will give you and your employees a good knowledge base on which to build. Details about less common disabilities or more detail about the main disability types can be obtained from organizations that work with those specific types of disabilities. Information about these agencies can be found at www.workablesolutionsbc.ca.

Sensitivity and Awareness Training

Creating an inclusive environment requires a concerted and focused approach. Training and orientation sessions that make use of the numerous resources that are available, such as disability organizations, videos, publications and guest speakers, set a strong leadership direction within the company. These sessions encourage staff to examine their beliefs and attitudes. With the right leadership, they will be able to make any needed changes.

Language

Words can unintentionally convey negative attitudes or stereotypes. For example, the words "disabled" and "handicapped" do not mean the same thing. A disability is a limitation on an individual's ability to perform an activity. A handicap is an environmental or attitudinal barrier that limits a person's full participation.

Note that it is correct to say "persons with disabilities" not "the disabled" or "disabled person." Language like "suffers from" or "afflicted by" should be avoided as it suggests constant pain and a sense of hopelessness.

Communication Tips[2]

- Think about the language you use – treat persons with disabilities as individuals.
- Don't patronize persons with disabilities. Don't tell someone with a disability that you admire their courage and strength unless they've done something that you would compliment anyone on.
- Look at the person when addressing them. Avoiding eye contact only increases discomfort or tension.
- Speak directly to the person, even if they are with an attendant or interpreter.
- Focus on work-related topics, just as you would with employees who don't have disabilities.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use expressions such as "see you later" or "got to be running along" that may relate to the person's disability.

Fostering an Inclusive Workplace

Creating an inclusive workplace is not something that can happen overnight; it requires commitment and follow-through by owners, managers and supervisors. For those who have decided to recruit persons with disabilities, the rewards have been tangible. The challenge to all employers is to make the commitment, get started and follow through.

Case Study

In the past, Universal Printing and Bindery of Vancouver worked with groups that would send them people with disabilities for work experience. This helped Shawn Hossein to learn more about their abilities and to become open to the idea of hiring someone with a disability full time. "As long as they can perform the job, that's what matters," he says. "If our business can help, that's great. I love to help anybody I can and in return they're helping my company to grow and get stronger."

BC Recruitment and Retention Research Report Case Studies

A graduated return to work process and job accommodation measures have helped John, a press operator at Universal Printing, along the road to recovery after a disabling back injury.

Checklist for Creating Inclusive Workplaces

- ☐ Is management providing clear focus and direction?
- ☐ Does management understand the link between achieving business objectives and hiring persons with disabilities?
- ☐ Are managers who hire and supervise staff clear on their responsibility to promote the organization's diversity objectives?
- ☐ Are managers held accountable for creating an inclusive culture?
- ☐ Are they rewarded if they are successful?
- ☐ What is the role of the human resources department, and is it providing appropriate support to managers?
- ☐ Are there simple, clear measures in place to track progress?

COMPONENT TWO: **Determining Job Design and Job Requirements**

Often, employers don't spend a lot of time analyzing and writing job requirements.

One of the most common accommodations required by persons with disabilities is some flexibility around job requirements. Often a person with a disability can perform all of the most important job requirements, but may have to work in an alternate way, on a different schedule or perhaps with some assistance. With some flexibility and understanding from the employer, that person can do the job.

For instance, job design and requirements are often based on "the way it's always been done." Assessing and writing inclusive job requirements is not about compromising on what needs to be done, but about considering how something needs to be done and who needs to do it.

Job Analysis

Job analysis is a process of assessing the essential components of any job prior to writing an inclusive or non-discriminatory job description, and then interviewing and selecting a good candidate for the job.

Often agencies that work with persons with disabilities have expertise and experience in doing job analysis.

As this step will ultimately impact the other steps in successfully recruiting a person with a disability, it is worth taking some time to do this and involving others who can help you with the process.

First, describe in detail the tasks that are considered to be part of the job in question. The next step is to assess each task by asking a number of questions about the job tasks. See www.workablesolutionsbc.ca for details.

This kind of analysis helps show where job duties could be altered to accommodate a person with a disability. It is important to focus on the desired outcome of the job — not the methods traditionally used to accomplish the outcome.

Job analysis also helps you think beyond convenient "credentials" or standard — but not necessary— requirements. Credentials such as "university degree required" can result in fully-qualified candidates being screened out too soon. Assessing the true requirements of the job and keeping an open mind about how those requirements are fulfilled is a necessary first step in eliminating barriers in your recruitment process.

> **"You learn from having employees with disabilities. Most of us without disabilities take things for granted and don't have a clue about some of the obstacles faced by others."**
>
> *BC small business owner*

Alternate work arrangements

Alternate work arrangements such as job sharing can improve the productivity of the shared position by utilizing the talents of two individuals and by ensuring that there is always coverage (no lost time due to vacation or illness as the job share partner is available to cover these periods). For job sharing to be successful, both individuals need to be well organized and communicate well. There should be a clear written agreement on what the arrangement will be.

Numerous studies have shown that telework or telecommuting allows employees to work from home and can improve their productivity by 15-25 percent. It is most commonly used for:

- professional and management employees who have an agreement to work at home one or two days a week
- research and programming jobs
- contract work such as telemarketing or call centre work.

"Modifying the worksite wasn't expensive in terms of what we've got back from it." *BC employer*

Employers benefit from not having to maintain workstations for employees. Workers benefit from not having to commute.

In addition to supporting your diverse workplace, alternative work arrangements can also result in reduced absenteeism, improved recruitment and retention, and improved job satisfaction.

Job Carving

Job carving involves melding job-seeker and employer needs through systematic workplace analysis and individualized career planning. Job carving begins with the concept of using a person's unique contributions and matching those to an employment setting. An individual's contribution to the workplace can be the specific sets of skills, personality traits, or other assets.

Job carving is generally reserved for individuals who are not likely to succeed, even with support, when going through a typical competitive employment application and interview process.

Part-time Employment

Sometimes, persons with disabilities are not able to work full-time due to the nature of their disabilities. For some, part-time employment is the best work arrangement. Part-time workers have regular hours of less than 30 hours a week and pro-rated benefits (as required by BC Employment Standards). Part-time employment allows companies to staff for the busier times, without having unnecessary staffing at other times. In particular, this flexibility is extremely important to service industries.

COMPONENT THREE: **Recruiting Persons with Disabilities**

3
Recruiting

While there is much to be gained from improved awareness and sensitivity about disability issues in the workplace, one of the most fundamental issues that has contributed to poor results in the workplace is the fact that improvements are needed in connecting labour demand (employers) and supply (persons with disabilities). Employers often say they don't know where to find potential employees with disabilities, or that persons with disabilities don't apply for posted openings. This section looks at how you can better access this under-utilized pool of talent.

Job Descriptions and Postings

The job analysis that you have done will help you to create a fair and inclusive job description, which in turn leads to the development of a job posting. The job description and posting not only reflect the available opening but, depending on how they are written, can signal to a job seeker with a disability that your company is open to considering persons with disabilities for the position.

"People with disabilities want to be involved, be productive, create, make money, and be with other employees as a team."
BC small business owner

Advertising

If you do use mainstream media or the Internet for advertising, it will be helpful to signal to persons with disabilities that they are welcome to apply. For example, saying, "We are an inclusive or accessible employer" will send the right message to a candidate with a disability.

Print or Internet advertising is most effective when used in conjunction with other recruitment strategies.

Recruiting through Local Agencies

Some private and not-for-profit organizations in BC offer a complete array of employer supports that include: candidate screening, preparation, referral, accommodation planning and placement follow-up. These organizations will work with you to identify your needs, assist with job analysis, screen candidates and then refer top-notch candidates to be interviewed by you.

Good practice employers have well-developed community outreach initiatives at the national and local levels, ensuring that prospective job candidates with disabilities learn about employment opportunities with their organizations.
Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities, Conference Board of Canada

Establishing a partnership with a local agency and developing a relationship built on service quality will reduce your worries and workload with respect to recruitment in general and also in terms of recruitment of persons with disabilities.

Selection Process

From a job seeker's perspective, the selection process (particularly the job interview) is stressful. For an employer, it is often the process used to select the candidate with the best qualifications for the job. A selection process based on a careful analysis of the job requirements, which have been incorporated into a job description, will not present barriers to persons with disabilities. The criteria need to be fair and applied consistently to all applicants.

If your goal is to find the best possible candidate for the job, you need to ensure your interview and testing process does not inadvertently eliminate an excellent candidate because of his or her disability. As indicated earlier, reliance on credentials or over-emphasis on previous work experience can be problematic for persons with disabilities, whose vocational development experiences may be different from candidates without disabilities.

Interviews

One approach that is being used more often by employers is "behaviour-based interviewing." Rather than asking about credentials or work history, this approach looks at candidate behaviours and competencies. Some candidates may have little actual work experience, but may have an extremely strong aptitude for the job in question.

FACT: Currently, only modest efforts are being made to reduce barriers. Few companies have disability management plans (10%) or workplace supports for persons with disabilities (22%). Some specific supports were used in more companies, such as flexible work hours (28%), and a friendly and encouraging work environment (33%).

Recruitment and Retention of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia Research Report

Interview Tips

- Ensure interview locations are accessible by people with mobility impairments or other disabilities.
- Ask all candidates in advance whether they have any needs that will require special support or accommodation during the interview.
- Be familiar with human rights guidelines or legislation about questions that can and cannot be asked, along with alternative ways to phrase questions to get the necessary information.
- Ask only questions that are job related. Law prohibits general inquiries about health problems. An employer can ask about physical ability, for instance, only in the context of a job requirement—e.g., the job requires moving heavy objects or strenuous activity.
- Ensure that interviewers are trained to recognize their biases. They should be trained to avoid making assumptions about whether a person can perform the essential functions of a role and encouraged to allow candidates to explain how they will fulfill key aspects of a job.

The Conference Board of Canada – Tapping the Talents of Persons with Disabilities

Selection Testing

Selection testing conditions often don't reflect the actual job conditions, so it's important to focus on the ability or skill that you are looking for and not the testing vehicle that is being used. At a minimum, you must ensure that the testing site and tools are accessible to a person with a disability. It is important to ask beforehand whether or not the candidate has any needs that require special support or accommodation during testing or for the interview.

Sometimes, for a person with a disability to demonstrate the desired skill or ability they may require an alternate testing format (e.g. an oral test instead of a written test). Other testing accommodations might include additional time (particularly where speed is not a desired skill) to complete tests.

Critical Success Factors – Recruitment

See the Individual & Focus on Ability, Not the Disability

The important thing about interviewing job candidates with disabilities is to focus on their abilities. Everyone has limitations; most of us just require a chance to let our abilities shine.

The earlier mentioned "behaviour-based" interviewing techniques will help a manager see past the limitations represented by the disability. Ask the person: "Do you see yourself being able to perform the majority of the functions involved in this job?"

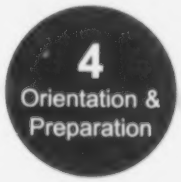
FACT: Companies with employees with disabilities are more aware and have better support systems. As could be expected, companies with employees with disabilities are more likely to be aware of disabilities than those without. As well, on the support and reducing barriers questions, those companies with employees with disabilities scored between 5 and 36 percentage points higher.

Recruitment and Retention of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia Research Report

Recruitment Tips

- Conduct a review of your hiring and employment practices to identify and address systemic barriers for persons with disabilities.
- Do your homework and select your partners with care. Identify and meet with local agencies in communities where your company operates.
- Recruit on college and university campuses that provide services for persons with disabilities.
- Many agencies that support and provide employment transition services for persons with disabilities have Internet sites. Send your postings to key agencies and other electronic job posting sites.
- Understand the essential requirements of the job being offered and ensure that requirements are valid and fair.
- Focus on the potential of the candidate and their specific skills – not on aspects of the disability that are not job-related.

COMPONENT FOUR: **Worksite Orientation and Worksite Preparation**



Orientation

In many respects, introducing a person with a disability into your business is no different than introducing any other new employee. A common-sense approach, together with a focus on the person's abilities rather than disabilites, is needed.

Like any new employee, a person with a disability needs to meet his or her colleagues, view the work location, and understand what is expected of them on the job. The key for employers is to be aware of and remain open to the possibility that a new employee with a disability may have specific questions or concerns that come up during orientation, which might not come up when you are orienting someone without a disability.

There is greater certainty of achieving a positive first experience if you have followed the steps set out in the "Getting Started" section.

Ensure Positive First Experiences

It is important to manage the introduction of people with disabilities in such a way that the first experience is positive for everyone. Don Cunningham, Executive Director of the employment placement agency Work-Able Services Inc., carries out an audit in the work sites he is involved with to determine how accessible they are before he places an individual. If the organization has had little exposure to people with disabilities, some of the subtler features of a barrier-free facility are unlikely to be in place. To ensure a successful placement, and to help those who have had little exposure to people with disabilities overcome fears and concerns, he will initially place people with less severe disabilities. Cunningham finds that cultures and facilities invariably evolve over time to become more inclusive, and he is then able to place individuals who require more supports.

The Conference Board of Canada

Accommodations

Employers often cite the cost of accommodations as a barrier to hiring persons with disabilities. This issue is often overstated. Mostly, accommodation turns out to be a combination of flexibility about hours, job requirements, and possibly some technology.

What Is Accommodation?

Accommodation means ensuring that facilities and products are accessible to customers and to prospective and current employees. In the context of employment, accommodation encompasses any modification or support that allows a person to do his or her job. This includes altering architectural features of the building, adapting work processes, and providing tools that an individual uses in the course of daily work.

The Conference Board of Canada

Sample Accommodations and Costs

- Changing a desk layout from the right to the left side for a data-entry operator who has a shoulder injury ($0).
- Supplying a telephone amplifier for a computer programmer who is hard of hearing ($70).
- Providing an articulating keyboard tray to alleviate the strain of repetitive motion and carpal tunnel syndrome ($150).
- Providing a specialized chair for a district sales agent to alleviate pain caused by a back injury ($400).
- Providing a drafting table, page turner and pressure-sensitive tape recorder for a sales agent with paralysis ($1,100).

The Job Accommodation Network Canada (JANCana)
http://216.13.114.21/workink.national/jancana.htm#facts

"There is no question accommodations can be expensive depending on the severity and type of disability and the individual; however, employers who experience accommodation will say it's priceless (e.g. adaptive equipment). I don't think employers understand the technology available – when they become aware, they are blown away. For example, regarding accommodation of two quadriplegic employees at a provincial crown corporation – the employer was amazed at the technology available." *BC Employer*

The vast majority of persons with disabilities who are currently employed require no special workplace accommodations whatsoever. One study by the Rohrer Institute in Toronto found that the cost of workplace accommodations ranged from no cost to a high of $2,300. Employees with disabilities can often be accommodated by simply moving furniture.

Communication with the Employee

When it comes to workplace accommodation solutions, the best person to talk to is the person with a disability. The individual is usually aware of his or her strengths and limitations. Often solutions can be arrived at through discussion and the application of common-sense solutions. Solutions such as modifying duties or work conditions are sometimes all that is needed to eliminate barriers so that the person with a disability can perform his or her job.

Work routines and requirements change. Employees are asked to do new things, do things differently, interact with different people, and so on. Any change can result in new barriers or emerging challenges—but if there is open communication, new challenges can be raised and dealt with simply and efficiently.

Barrier-Free Design

There are some basic barrier-free workplace accommodations that every employer and place of business should consider, such as ramps and other physical accommodations that not only help employees, but also open your business to customers with disabilities. Information about agencies that can assist you with all aspects of accommodation planning is available at www.workablesolutionsbc.ca.

Accommodation Funding Resources

Federal and Provincial government employment programs for persons with disabilities may consider funding support for accommodation costs on a case-by-case basis. Additional information on funding resources is available at www.workablesolutionsbc.ca. Community agencies will also have information about securing funding for accommodations for persons with disabilities.

Canada Revenue Agency

Currently, employers and businesses may deduct amounts paid during the taxation year for alterations to a building for the purposes of accessibility for persons with disabilities. These amounts can be claimed as current expenses rather than Capital Costs.

For employees eligible for the Disability Tax Credit, employers may also provide some disability-related employment benefits without those benefits being considered employment income. Examples of these benefits include:

- transportation to and from work
- parking near the workplace
- readers for the visually impaired
- signers for employees with hearing disabilities
- coaches for employees with intellectual disabilities

Refer to the Canada Revenue Agency's *Employers Guide To Taxable Benefits* for more information.

COMPONENT FIVE:
Employee Development

Persons with disabilities are like other employees; they want to do a good job, benefit from constructive supervision, enjoy new challenges and get ahead. One way for employers to retain employees is to establish career development plans for all employees, including those with disabilities, and follow through on these plans.

Career Planning

Persons with disabilities have aspirations and career goals. Supervisors should discuss career expectations with each employee, and evaluate the employee's interests, talents, and skills in relation to the requirements of available jobs. If an employee's career goals seem unachievable, the supervisor should provide constructive feedback and try to reach an agreement with the employee on appropriate goals and paths to achieving them. The supervisor should not assume an employee's disability will be a barrier.

Skills Training

Although recent surveys show that persons with disabilities are accessing education and training to levels that are closer to those of their counterparts without disabilities, employers and persons with disabilities themselves report that a lack of skills and training continues to be an obstacle to employment.

> **"We don't expect perfection because even people without disabilities aren't perfect. It's a learning curve for the employer too, don't forget."**
>
> BC small business owner

The Canadian Abilities Foundation (CAF) survey of persons with disabilities found that four out of ten respondents indicated they need "more formal education to improve their qualifications and job prospects" (Canadian Abilities Foundation, 2004, p.11). Fifty-nine percent of respondents in the same research strongly agreed that they needed more practical training, such as specialized courses or on-the-job training. Almost 60 percent of them indicated that training costs were an obstacle, and that these need to be shared by government, business and employees with disabilities.

Some agencies provide innovative skills development programs that offer intensive, job specific training for persons with disabilities. This training prepares participants for specific job roles and also provides them with job specific skills and industry knowledge.

Effective Performance Management

Performance management practices vary widely among companies. Some companies have formal procedures, some informal, and some a combination of the two. Employers must treat employees with disabilities the same as all other employees. If a position has been restructured to accommodate a person's disability, evaluate the employee only on those tasks he or she is expected to perform, but apply the same performance standards to employees with disabilities that are applied to all employees.

All employees need regular, on-going constructive feedback and support as part of effective performance management.

Team Building

Employers should ensure that employees with disabilities have leadership opportunities and are assigned to special projects, planning sessions, off-site projects and assignments requiring travel. Do not make career development decisions for an employee with a disability based on limiting concepts or stereotypes about that employee's disability.

Networking and Social Interaction

Employers should include employees with disabilities in both formal work groups and informal employee gatherings. People with disabilities enjoy the same types of social and recreational activities as employees without disabilities. Frequently, business is discussed at these events, and interpersonal relationships are developed. All employees should be given the opportunity to participate. Employers should arrange events in accessible facilities to accommodate staff with disabilities.

Mentoring

All staff can benefit from the guidance of more experienced employees. Employers should encourage employees to find mentors, whether or not the employee or mentor has a disability.

Organizational Training and Development

Training opportunities should be available to employees with disabilities. Management and leadership training should be among the options available, in addition to specific skills training. Formal classes must be held in accessible facilities. Materials should be available in large print for persons who are visually impaired; interpreters should be provided for participants who are hearing-impaired; and other necessary accommodations should be made.

COMPONENT SIX: **Support and Retention of Employees with Disabilities**

Recruiting persons with disabilities is a big part of your challenge to include them in your workforce. However, you have to put effort into supporting employees with disabilities in order to ensure their continued contribution to your organization. There are a number of retention activities you can use to keep employees with disabilities.

Employment Agency Support

> **"The other staff were very excited when we hired someone with a disability and they have been very supportive."**
> *BC employer*

Effective recruitment and retention practices include partnerships with community-based employment agencies. In its commitment to you as an employer, the agency must be available on an ongoing basis following placement, to support you, the employee with a disability and your other employees.

Natural Supports

It is important to establish support from supervisors and co-workers in the workplace to assist employees with disabilities to perform their jobs, including supports already provided by employers for all employees. These "natural" supports may be both formal and informal, and include mentoring, supervision (ongoing feedback on job performance), training (learning a new job skill with a co-worker) and socializing with employees with disabilities at breaks or after work. The use of natural supports increases the integration and acceptance of an employee with a disability within the workplace.

Vocational Crisis Support

> **"Often persons with disabilities don't stay with an employer long because they feel isolated, not included; much of the work day is social interaction – they are on their own much during coffee, lunch, etc..."** *BC Person with a Disability*

Even with your commitment and a number of support mechanisms in place, situations can occur that can jeopardize the continued employment of a person with a disability. Workplaces are dynamic settings. Workflow, responsibilities and technologies change. Change can be difficult for everyone, but sometimes it is even more difficult for a person with a disability. "Vocational crisis interventions" are aimed at assisting you to provide needed supports and services that will allow the employee with a disability to maintain their employment with you. Vocational crisis assistance is available through the Employment Program for Persons with Disabilities, BC Ministry of Human Resources.

Monitoring Results

When a commitment is made to develop a more inclusive workplace, and specifically to recruit and retain persons with disabilities, part of that commitment must be to monitor and evaluate your organization's progress. This is particularly important for larger firms that have specialized human resources functions. As an employer you need to know that the commitment your company has made goes beyond the human resources unit into all departments.

Typical measures that track changes might include:

- *perceptions and attitudes:* measured by polling employees through surveys or focus groups
- *improved accessibility:* measured by conducting an accessibility audit and monitoring efforts to eliminate gaps
- *access to job candidates:* measured by tracking and assessing returns on outreach activities.

COMPONENT SEVEN: **Return to Work and Disability Management Programs**

A disabling injury or illness can happen to anyone at any time. At any given time, roughly 10 percent of the workforce in BC is off work due to injury, and is receiving compensation or long-term disability benefits.

The financial, social and personal costs of a disability can be overwhelming if the situation is not handled properly. A serious injury or illness can mean a loss of income and future security, resulting in emotional, social and financial hardship. The longer an employee is away from work with a disability, the less likely it is that he or she will return to work. After only one year of absence, for example, the return rate drops to 20 percent.

If you are an employer who is faced with an employee who has become disabled, there are proven strategies for helping your employee return to work. By implementing some basic principles, you can help to support your employees *and* protect your investment in them.

Be Proactive – Develop a Disability Management Program

There are a number of key success factors in disability management. Working through these factors will help you to establish a program that works for you.

Having clear goals for disability management

What are your goals for having a disability management program? Do you wish to protect your employees? Reduce your insurance costs? Protect your investment in skilled workers? Reduce the length of time that an injured employee is away from work?

> **"Employees returning to work after an injury, or who have a disability, have a tendency to be more loyal employees."**
> *BC resource company*

Whatever your goals may be, articulating them and using them to establish a framework for your disability management program is a good first step. Questions to ask may include the following:

- How is your organization currently set up to deal with disability management?
- Do you have any formal programs in place?
- Have you had any past successes or failures in this area?
- Do you have dedicated human resource personnel?
- Do you work with unions or professional organizations?
- Do you have an insurance carrier? If so, how can they help?
- What resources do you have that you can turn to for advice?
- Are there industry trends that impact the need for disability management?
- Is your workforce aging?
- Have any concerns been raised about disability management?
- What sort of budget do you have to invest in this area?

Measuring and tracking key information

Having determined your goals, the next step is to consider how you will measure your progress toward these goals. For example, if one of your goals is to reduce injury rates by 10 percent over the next year, you will need to track injury occurrence data. Similarly, if one of your goals is to reduce the average return to work time to six months, then you need to track this information as well. Tracking your progress will help to reach your goals.

Implementing effective safety programs

Workplace injury is one of the leading causes of employee disability. Having programs in place to reduce injury is a key success factor in disability management. Do you have injury prevention programs in place currently? How could you improve in this area? Would a simple ergonomic change result in fewer injuries? What have other employers in your industry done to reduce workplace injuries?

Developing employee wellness programs

Similarly, many disabilities can be prevented or lessened through healthy living and employee wellness initiatives. Do you work in a high-stress industry? If so, how can you lessen the impact of stress on your employees? Is your workforce aging? If so, what can you do as an employer to promote good health? Does your insurance provider offer employee wellness support? If so, are employees aware of these programs?

Providing early intervention in the case of an injury

Experience shows us that early intervention is vital if an employee becomes disabled through illness or injury. The longer an employee is away from work, the less likely he or she is to return successfully. Consequently, having a disability management plan in place *before* someone becomes disabled helps to ensure the quickest possible response.

Using a team approach

Successful disability management programs rely on a team approach. For example, a large employer may have a disability management team composed of senior managers, human resource specialists, union representatives, insurance providers, medical professionals and others.

Smaller employers may include external resources such as disability associations, rehabilitation specialists and consultants to provide the information needed for a successful disability management program.

Someone on the team should be designated as the key disability management contact within your organization.

Increasing awareness of disability management within the organization

Fostering sound disability management practices requires that people in your organization understand disability management concepts and your organization's goals in this area. Communication and awareness are key to your success.

Using creative approaches to accommodating disabilities

See the section on "Workplace Orientation and Worksite Preparation" for details on accommodation.

What to Do if an Employee Becomes Disabled

One of the keys to success is identifying the disability as early as possible. In some cases, identification may be straightforward. In others, such as a progressive mental illness, it may not be clear that a disability is developing. One of the benefits of a solid disability management program is that disabling conditions are identified much sooner. This allows for early intervention, which is key to successful outcomes.

When a disability is identified, the first step is to establish immediate, supportive contact with the employee. This will help to build a foundation of trust and encourage a cooperative approach to the return to work process. During this first contact, the situation should be assessed to determine if intervention is required. In some cases, a formal return to work plan may be required.

If it is determined that a return to work plan is required, the first step is to assess the best course of action for the employee. A return to work plan contains:

- a functional assessment of the job position
- medical advice for a safe and timely return to work
- rehabilitation or other supports that are required to help the employee return to a work-ready state
- the identification of any retraining that may be required
- an agreement with the employee outlining the return to work process, hours of work, duties and dates that they will return, etc.

It is best to seek the advice of an experienced return to work professional – either someone on your staff or an external service provider.

Disability management resources can be found www.workablesolutionsbc.ca.

Return to Work in Action

Heather has worked for the Vancouver Island Health Authority for 11 years. Seven years ago, she was diagnosed with osteoarthritis in her knees. Over the years her condition worsened to the point where she could no longer perform her job. She spent a year on Long-Term Disability before beginning a graduated return to work process.

Heather participated in a rehabilitation program designed to get her work-ready again. She was provided a wheelchair to get to and from work, as well as a walker to use at work. Her work area was rearranged to make extra space, and her employer installed handbars in the washroom.

At first, Heather started back at work part-time earlier but after six weeks she was working full-time.

Endnotes

[1] There is no universal definition of "disability." Many definitions are related to programs and reflect the criteria that are used to determine eligibility for that program. Some definitions are more widely accepted. In the context of persons with disabilities in the BC labour force and seeking or maintaining employment, a fairly specific working definition can be used, such as one referred to in R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2003): "Persons with disabilities are those who regard themselves or believe that an employer would likely consider them disadvantaged by reason of any persistent physical, mental, psychiatric, and learning or dexterity impairment. The condition must be the primary barrier to finding and maintaining employment."

[2] From "Employment Series for Persons with Disabilities: Tips for Employers" Government of Alberta and Social Development Canada.

Resources

An important part of considering, planning, recruiting and employing persons with disabilities is being aware of the full range of resources available to employers and persons with disabilities.

Whether seeking special workplace accommodation tools or advice on how to source and interview persons with disabilities, employers need to inform themselves of resources for recruiting and retaining persons with disabilities.

See www.workablesolutionsbc.ca for information on these and other topics:

- Organizations for sourcing persons with disabilities
- Mechanisms for matching employers and persons with disabilities
- Community service providers
- Education and training programs
- Government services and funding
- Internet-based website accessibility resources
- Accommodation resources (e.g. building design, office space, equipment, work processes, work scheduling, etc.)
- Disability-specific information and agencies (e.g. hearing disabilities, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, visual disabilities, mental health, etc.)
- Group-specific information and agencies (e.g. Aboriginal, women, etc.)
- Business and community networks
- Other information, reports and statistics.

Notes

Notes

For additional information and resources see www.workablesolutionsbc.ca